Funds sliced, teacher sells ads on tests

By Linda Lou UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER November 22, 2008

RANCHO BERNARDO – Kevin Change said it was strange the first time he saw an advertisement across the bottom of his calculus test. But now he and his classmates look for them.

Some are pithy one-liners, hawking the names of local businesses: "Brace Yourself for a Great Semester! Braces by Henry, Stephen P. Henry D.M.D."

Others are inspirational quotes, like "Keep the company of those who seek the truth, and run from those who have found it – Vaclay Havel."

They only appear on the first page of an exam.

The unusual advertising may be here to stay, said calculus teacher Tom Farber, who came up with the idea to pay for his printing costs.

Farber said the money he gets for printing was cut this year to about \$300 for two semesters. Printing the quizzes and tests costs more than \$500, he said, and doesn't include handouts that students download and print on their own.

To reduce expenses, the Poway Unified School District chose to trim materials and supplies instead of personnel, Superintendent Don Phillips said. Each high school in the district reduced its budget for such items by 30 percent, but how that was accomplished was left to each campus, he said.

Phillips said teachers have been reaching out to parents for donations for a while, but Farber's idea is "one of the more creative ones."

Farber's customers pay \$10 for an ad on a quiz, \$20 to be on a chapter test and \$30 for a spot on a semester final. Some of the quotes, either personal ones or by famous people, are paid for by parents.

The messages must be appropriate and in good taste. Farber hasn't received sponsorships from any major retailers or store chains, but he hasn't ruled them out. He said he would prefer to get ads from local mom-and-pop stores, such as a tuxedo shop around prom time.

Farber said he could have decided to give fewer tests to save money, but that would have meant students had less practice for passing the Advanced Placement calculus exam near the end of the school year.

Farber, a teacher in the Poway Unified district since 1992, said he has never had to ask parents for help until this year. But with the state of the economy the way it is, he said, schools might have to depend even more on parents.

Farber said he came up with the idea over the summer. He saw ads on public buses and sponsorships at Qualcomm Stadium and decided to promote his idea at Back to School Night in September. He collected \$270 from parents at that event.

"I haven't heard any negativity," he said.

Farber said he has sold about \$350 in ads, more than enough to make up what the school budget doesn't pay for. He said he still has ad space for next semester, and whatever extra money he collects will go to the math department for other teachers to use. Checks are made out to the department.

Colleagues haven't copied his idea yet, Farber said, but some have been asking parents for donations.

Students said they are paying attention to the messages.

Lauren Meyer, 17, a senior, said the ads are a good solution to the budget problem.

Her classmate, Chris Nunez, 18, a senior, always looks at the ads before he starts working on the questions. Both said they enjoy the quotes.

"They're inspirational," Nunez said. "Sometimes, they help when the test is stressful."

Luke Shaw, 17, was less enthusiastic. The senior said a recent sponsorship that was the name of a structural engineering company didn't do anything for him.

"I'm always hoping that someone will sponsor it with a trig formula or something useful," he said.

Ads may be purchased by e-mailing Farber at **tfarber@powayusd.com**.

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